

EFYC Presentation to Youth Engagement T & F Panel 18th May 2015

The purpose of our presentation this evening is to give you an in-sight into the activity of the currently elected cohort of Youth Councillors, and also a broader overview of the work of our predecessors since the Youth Council was originally formed seven years ago in 2009. To compliment our presentation, packs have been put together for each of you with examples of the resources the Youth Council has lead on producing, conference reports, photographs and so on.

In terms of the current cohort, our predecessors did an excellent job at handing over the baton to ensure that we had an "A" political elected body of 21 Youth Councillors from April 2014.

45 candidates stood for the 21 seats that were up for grabs last March and an amazing 2488 votes were democratically cast making the last elections the best ever.

The Youth Council`s primary focus this year is to ensure that our peers and schools are fully involved in our work. We are continuing to report to School Councils in order to be a clear link between wider young people and the District Council.

By far our highest profile event since taking up office was our Youth Conference on 14th October last year. We hosted the Epping Forest Youth Conference in the Council Chamber and 90 pupils from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10, representing ten secondary schools from in and around the Epping Forest District, came along. We wanted to consult with our peers about the main issues affecting the lives of local young people. We wanted to get their views on possible solutions, and gather their innovative ideas on how to improve the local community. Additionally we were keen to promote the importance of local democracy to pupils.

The three main concerns highlighted by our delegates were, alcohol misuse, bullying and stress. Issues also raised were around skills and jobs, the need for more volunteering opportunities for young people and the misuse of drugs, particularly "legal highs."

Our findings have been shared with the Epping Forest Youth Strategy Group, and we really hope that the people who hold the purse strings take notice of what local young people are saying.

In response to delegates` specific concerns that bullying is a major issue, and that it is not always addressed by schools, the Youth Councillors launched our own campaign called " #URNot Alone" during National Bullying Awareness Week in November.

Our campaign highlighted the services and support groups for victims of bullying and their parents. Youth Councillors delivered school presentations on this topic and to compliment these, we designed a USB memory stick wrist band promoting the #URNotAlone Bullying Awareness campaign. It includes the link to the EFYC web page which has our Fact Sheet promoting phone numbers and support groups for

young people, victims and parents. The wrist bands were distributed to pupils and teachers also gave their support by posting selfies on the EFYC Facebook page, holding the #URNotAlone statement and promoting the support services such as Childline and Samaritans. The project was deemed a great success by pupils, parents and teaching staff. Most significantly, last month our work was formally recognised when we were awarded the prestigious County-wide High Sheriff of Essex's shield and £1000 towards our project.

Social media is an important part of our work as it not only promotes what we are doing but it raises the positive profile of young people in the Epping Forest district. We currently have 515 followers on Twitter and 389 'Likes' on Facebook. During our anti-bullying campaign we had over 7200 views on Twitter and 42 new followers.

Giving young people a voice is what the Youth Council is all about. Therefore, we have been delighted to have been asked to contribute to 10 separate consultations since taking up office and we're also pleased to have representation on the Epping Forest Youth Strategy Group, where we feel we make a valuable contribution and give young people a voice in the decision making process.

Youth volunteering is a big theme for us. As young volunteers ourselves we are passionate about encouraging other young people to volunteer. We really like the Council's Youth Volunteer Programme which is now being taken up by all secondary schools in the district. We ourselves have tried out one of the Youth Volunteer Days and were supported by staff from the City of London to help clear an area of woodland. This was a great team building experience for us, but more than that, we felt a real sense of achievement at the end of the day. Consequently, in the summer we are hosting an open youth volunteering day where wider young people can come along and give volunteering a try.

To support this work we have secured funding from the Police & Crime Commissioners fund to re-visit a project our predecessors started – this involved the production of a "Young Persons' Guide to Volunteering". The guides, which are provided in a handy Oyster card holder wallet, signpost young people towards volunteering opportunities and include some handy tips about volunteering.

Something that we hear a lot is that there is a need to break down barriers between the older residents in the district and young people. Our predecessors developed the inter-generational project which has been well received by the residents from Jubilee Court in Waltham Abbey and Leonard Davis House in North Weald. We, in turn, have hosted an event at Buckhurst Court in Buckhurst Hill in partnership with the Voluntary Action Epping Forest Carers Group and Sheltered Housing team. Lots more of these types of event are planned as the feedback we have had from older residents has been overwhelmingly positive.

Another event that we have been involved in was a project developed by Community Services called Rural Roots. A large scale community fun day was organised in the village of Fyfield last summer and we were pleased to support this in a number of ways; in advance of the event we spoke to local businesses and collected donations to the value of £400, and we then manned stalls on the day and raised a further £120 for the Help the Heroes charity.

A further notable achievement for us is that Youth Councillor Evangeline Foster was selected as an Ambassador for the prestigious 'Step Up to Serve' campaign, for her community and volunteering work. Evie also sits on the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner Youth Forum and has taken part in County consultations to address the issues raised by young people.

Over the past 7 years the Youth Council has lead on numerous high profile projects. These have included:

- Environmental initiatives involving schools surveys and the subsequent distribution of energy saving devices for school IT departments.
- Transport initiatives involving mystery shopping the quality of the local bus services for young people, a comprehensive survey and subsequent discussions with Essex County Council about the concerns of Epping Forest young people.
- Speed meeting events with adult Council Members and senior officers
- A project focussing on personal safety and the development of an educational DVD and booklet called "How Safe Are You". This particular project was adopted across West Essex as it was so well received. There was also a follow up card produced clarifying "How to Report a Crime".
- One of the highest profile initiatives that the Youth Council has been involved in consistently over the years is the mapping of local youth groups in the area. Following the familiar comment from young people that there is "nothing to do" in their area, back in 2011 Youth Councillors first came up with the idea of identifying exactly what groups were running and then going to visit them "under cover" to review what they were like. The additional benefit of this exercise was that it allowed Youth Councillors to consult with local young people who live in the area but attend school outside of the district. Ultimately, this then lead to the first Youth Project of the Year Awards with groups being star rated. The following year the project grew, and the first tube-map style posters were produced showing young people where youth groups were running and how to contact them. The most recent tube map was put together in 2014. Ultimately, this is an excellent example of a piece of work done for young people, by young people, that no other agency had previously undertaken in our area.
- Numerous events and conferences have been organised by the Youth Council and radio interviews and press releases happen on a regular basis – all of which raise the profile of Epping Forest young people and the District Council.

A significant number of Youth Councillors have gone on to be high profile ambassadors for young people over the years. Many have gone on to become Head Boy or Girl in their school, many have further promoted the youth democracy agenda whilst at university, and 6 past Youth Councillors have actually secured employment with the Council as casual staff supporting holiday initiatives for children and young people.

Finally, we feel that a significant fact to note is that, since being set up in 2009, the Youth Council has been able to secure in excess of £28,000 of external funding for youth initiatives in the district. This is funding that we are told would not have been available to the Council without a constituted body of young people in place.

We appreciate that we've covered lots of information very quickly here, so please feel free to ask us any questions you may have. The packs that you have contain a wealth of information which we would encourage you to peruse at your leisure.

Thank you for listening.